News From the Wyoming Department of Health

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Wyoming's Kid Care CHIP Program Making a Difference

May 1-7 is "Cover the Uninsured Week"

CHEYENNE – While the Wyoming Department of Health estimates between 14,000 and 17,000 Wyoming children do not have health insurance, the state's Kid Care CHIP program is making a difference by covering more than 5,000 previously uninsured children.

With Kid Care CHIP, qualified parents are able to get low-cost insurance for their children to cover vision, dental, inpatient services, hospitalization, prescriptions and more until they reach the age of 19. An additional 28,520 children receive healthcare services through Wyoming's EqualityCare (Medicaid) program.

"Wyoming would have many, many more uninsured children without programs such as Kid Care CHIP and EqualityCare. These programs take a tremendous burden off of parents' shoulders and provide critical healthcare for many Wyoming children," said Dr. Brent Sherard, Wyoming Department of Health director. "Kid Care CHIP in particular has been expanded in recent years to cover more children living in middle income families."

In the past two years alone, the uninsured rate for Wyoming's children has declined slightly due to increases in income eligibility for families applying for the programs. Kid Care CHIP began in 1999 and was adjusted in 2005 to accommodate coverage of children from families with incomes up to 200 percent of poverty level guidelines. For a family of four, the qualifying level is a gross income of \$3,334 a month or less.

Patricia Guzman, Kid Care CHIP program manager in Wyoming, said "People call our office many times a week asking about healthcare coverage. They are delighted when Kid Care CHIP covers their children, but many say they are also uninsured. These parents want the whole family to have access to healthcare." Including both children and adults, there are more than 70,000 uninsured Wyoming residents according to the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

The Wyoming Legislature recently voted to expand insurance coverage to parents of Kid Care CHIP participants with a program that will be partly employer-sponsored. It is not expected the program will be up and running until some time in 2007.

A healthcare coverage hotline for people with questions about applying for Kid Care CHIP and EqualityCare is available from 8-5, Monday-Friday by calling 1-877-KIDS NOW, (1-877-543-7669). Applications are also available at local Department of Family Services or county public health offices.